

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SAM-01 IO-10 AF-06 OPIC-03

DHA-02 ACDA-05 SAJ-01 OMB-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07

INR-07 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 FRB-03

AGR-05 ORM-02 AID-05 PM-04 H-02 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /116 W
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P R 071645Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4892

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL OPORTO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

USMISSION NATO

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJ: CUNHAL-SOARES DEBATE

SUMMARY: SOCIALIST LEADER SOARES AND COMMUNIST LEADER CUNHAL
ENGAGED IN DEBATE ON NATIONAL TELEVISION FOR ALMOST
FOUR HOURS EVENING OF NOV 6-7. ALTHOUGH SUBSTANCE OF COMMENTS
BY BOTH LEADERS CONSISTED PRIMARILY OF REITERATION OF PARTY
POSITIONS, SOARES RETAINED THE INITIATIVE THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE
PROGRAM. ALTHOUGH NEITHER SOARES NOR CUNHAL SCORED A DECISIVE
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VICTORY, THIS ROUND WENT TO SOARES ON POINTS. END SUMMARY.

1. SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) SECRETARY GENERAL MARIO SOARES CLASHED WITH HIS COMMUNIST PARTY (PCP) COUNTERPART ALVARO CUNHAL IN A NOV 6 NATIONALLY-TELEVISED DEBATE. NO TIME LIMIT WAS SET ON DEBATE, WHICH LASTED ALMOST FOUR HOURS AND ENDED SHORTLY BEFORE 2:00 AM NOV 7. THE USE OF A SPLIT-SCREEN PICTURE POINTED UP INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS TO THE CUT-AND-THRUST: SOARES'S CALM, DELIBERATE STYLE AND MOCKING SMILE CONTRASTED WITH CUNHAL'S RAPID, EXCITABLE, AND OCCASIONALLY NERVOUS MANNER. BOTH WERE MANIFESTLY CORDIAL TO ONE ANOTHER. HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED:

--PCP ROLE IN GOVERNMENT: SOARES CRITICIZED THE PCP FOR ITS TWO-FACED POLICY CONCERNING THE AZEVEDO GOVERNMENT (WHICH HE LABELED THE "LAST ALTERNATIVE"), CHARGING THAT THE PCP FORMED PART OF THE GOVERNMENT WHILE AT THE SAME TIME MANEUVERING TO CAUSE ITS DOWNFALL. CUNHAL COUNTERED WITH FAMILIAR LINE THAT PCP WOULD SUPPORT GOVERNMENT TO EXTENT IT WAS REPRESENTED IN GOVERNMENT AND THAT PARTY WOULD NEVER ABANDON WORKERS.

--ANTI-DEMOCRATIC TACTICS: SOARES REPEATEDLY CATALOGUED PCP TRANSGRESSIONS OF DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE, AND CALLED FOR THE PCP TO ACCEPT THE VERDICT OF THE PEOPLE IN FREE ELECTIONS. CUNHAL COUNTERED THAT THE PCP SUPPORTED THE "FULLEST POSSIBLE DEMOCRATIC LIBERTIES," AND WOULD ACCEPT ELECTORAL RESULTS WHEN PCP FREEDOM OF ACTION IN ALL PARTS OF COUNTRY, INCLUDING AZORES, COULD BE ASSURED.

--PS ANTI-COMMUNISM: CUNHAL'S CLAIMS OF PS ANTI-COMMUNISM WERE REFUTED, TELLINGLY, BY SOARES'S DEPICTION OF THE PCP AS A RENEGADE PARTY IN RELATION TO THE OTHER WESTERN EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTIES. SOARES CONTRASTED THE "UNDEMOCRATIC" BEHAVIOR OF THE PCP WITH THAT OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, WHICH ACCEPTED "RULE OF THE DEMOCRATIC GAME."

--AGRARIAN REFORM: CUNHAL GLOWINGLY DEFENDED THE "CONQUESTS" OF THE AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM IN THE ALENTEJO. SOARES CRITICIZED THE ACTIVITY OF PCP-CONTROLLED UNIONS, AND PREDICTED THAT IRRESPONSIBLE PCP-INSPIRED ACTIONS WERE BRINGING PORTUGAL TO THE BRINK OF AGRICULTURAL RUIN.

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--DECOLONIZATION: CUNHAL URGED GOP RECOGNITION OF THE MPLA AS THE SOLE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ANGOLAN PEOPLE, AND WARNED THAT FAILURE TO DO SO WOULD SERIOUSLY COMPROMISE PORTUGUESE RELATIONS WITH FORMER COLONIES AND THIRD WORLD NATIONS. SOARES SUPPORTED CURRENT GOP DECOLONIZATION POLICIES AS BEING IN THE "NATIONAL INTEREST."

--POLITICS OF COMMUNICATION: SOARES REPEATEDLY ATTACKED PCP

EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH HEGEMONY OVER THE COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA. CUNHAL RESPONDED WITH CLAIMS THAT RECENT INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE IN THIS AREA WERE "SPONTANEOUS ACTIONS BY AN AROUSED WORKING CLASS" AND NOT PCP-DIRECTED OPERATIONS.

3. COMMENT: SUBSTANCE OF COMMENTS BY BOTH CUNHAL AND SOARES CONSISTED PRIMARILY OF REITERATION OF FAMILIAR PS AND PCP POSITIONS. SOARES SPOKE FIRST AND HELD THE FLOOR FOR EIGHTEEN MINUTES BEFORE CUNHAL GOT IN THE FIRST WORD. ALTHOUGH THE SPEAKING TIME BECAME MORE BALANCED AS THE EVENING WENT ON, SOARES RETAINED THE INITIATIVE THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE PROGRAM. CUNHAL WAS ON UNUSUALLY GOOD BEHAVIOR BUT OFTEN ON THE DEFENSIVE. HE APPEARED PARTICULARLY UNEASY ON THE SEVERAL OCCASIONS WHEN SOARES COMPARED THE CONDUCT OF THE PCP WITH THAT OF THE SPANISH AND ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTIES. CUNHAL WAS MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN HE WAS ON THE FAMILIAR GROUND OF IDEOLOGY AND DOCTRINE. SOARES AND CUNHAL HAVE AGREED TO A SECOND DEBATE, DATE UNSPECIFIED. ALTHOUGH NEITHER SOARES NOR CUNHAL SCORED A DECISIVE VICTORY, ROUND ONE WENT TO SOARES ON POINTS.
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